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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Al-Hakim Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

As the world's population reaches 7 billion, 11 years after efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals first got under way, poverty, ignorance and disease continue to constitute a serious global challenge, while millions of people, and many societies, still suffer from the burden of poverty and its attendant ills, including marginalization, exclusion and discrimination.

Despite all the commitments, promises and action programmes at the local, national and international levels aimed at the eradication of poverty, there remains a yawning gap between theoretical solutions and the social reality, which is dominated by poverty, exclusion and injustice and in many societies, especially in developing countries, where it has become an indicator of the existence of social imbalance.

Because of natural disasters in some countries, including floods, droughts and earthquakes, many people have been deprived of their livelihoods, placed at risk of deadly diseases and compelled to leave their homes and migrate elsewhere, with the result that large numbers of these people are now living below the poverty line, and all the efforts that have gone to promote sustainable social development may prove to have been wasted. The main cause of poverty, however, is still human behaviour: it is the phenomena of exploitation, corruption and greed that have touched off the current wave of economic crises, armed conflicts and policies of marginalization and social isolation. All of these may be considered primary causes of the spread of poverty worldwide, in addition to the unjustifiable and sophisticated practices routinely utilized by many Governments, which are one reason why plans and projects aimed at eliminating poverty are ineffective, and also why services do not reach disadvantaged social groups in many societies.

It is an acknowledged fact that poverty is both a cause and a result of one of the main violations of human rights and forms of discrimination, namely the right to adequate food, which is one of the most important human rights. Moreover, it is generally agreed that inadequate income is not the only manifestation of poverty: other indicators include lack of opportunity and participation, limited access to health care, education, knowledge and means of obtaining information. All these are interrelated aspects of a single process resulting in the denial of people's rights, and in a life of poverty.

It follows from the above that oppression and injustice in the distribution and allocation of resources and the delivery of social services are among the leading causes of poverty, which in turn is a serious threat to health, prosperity, human dignity and human rights, forming as it does a barrier that is difficult to surmount; a barrier that tends to prevent poor people from participating fully in the development of their communities, in that, all too frequently, they are ignored and their voices are unheard.

The entire world has seen how Arab youth from disadvantaged social groups in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and other countries have risen in revolt to destroy dictatorships that had become riddled with corruption and had contributed to the isolation, marginalization and impoverishment of their societies, and how the demand for justice, an end to oppression and the elimination of corruption have been the driving force behind the revolutions of the Arab Spring.

We believe that the absence of justice in the distribution of wealth and the unjustifiable squandering of resources will remain an obstacle to all poverty

eradication plans and strategies. Moreover, statistics show that there are frightening numbers of poor people in the world, even as billions in resources continue to be wasted on armaments, the trade in narcotics and in similar areas.

We also believe that it is essential to ensure that people living in a state of poverty participate fundamentally and effectively in poverty eradication programmes and policies, inasmuch as they are the main beneficiaries of such activities, and, as such, must play a fundamental role in the design, monitoring and assessment of them.

We should like to reiterate that it is crucial for poverty eradication programmes to begin with the individual, through acculturation, education and investment in people to enable them to release their creative talents and allow them to innovate, develop and flower.

On the occasion of the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development, we should like to repeat our argument that it is essential to study the principles and legal provisions introduced by the monotheistic religions for the purpose of preventing exploitation and ending poverty and to conduct research into the feasibility of putting those principles and provisions to good use in designing strategies for combating poverty around the world. The divine Islamic religion, for example, gave the world legal provisions that serve to promote the eradication of poverty, the achievement of economic and social development and the realization of social solidarity by means of the *zakat*, or alms-tax, and the *khums*, or the one-fifth tax, both of which are forms of transfer of wealth from the wealthy to the poor. Islamic law also prohibits interest in order to prevent material exploitation, and there are other provisions that aim at strengthening solidarity among people.

With reference to Iraq in particular, we still have many groups that are afflicted by the issues of poverty and unemployment, despite the Government's efforts, because of the prevalence of administrative corruption and the lack of effective mechanisms to ensure that the laws are applied and that opportunities for Government employment are fairly distributed.

It is essential to activate the role of the Iraqi civil society institutions that were established to monitor the eradication of poverty because, since they can deliver a great deal in that area, they are key partners. As regards the Al-Hakim Foundation specifically, ever since its establishment in 2003, it has implemented numerous anti-poverty programmes as well as programmes aimed at helping marginalized social groups, such as the "orphan sponsorship" programme, which has brought benefits to 100,000 orphans, and numerous other programmes designed to help young people, including in beginning to build their married lives, by providing them with material and economic support. The Foundation also supervises educational institutions, which have provided primary, secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities for nearly 9,000 boys and girls.

In conclusion, we should like to reiterate that the Al-Hakim Foundation supports the "Social Protection Floor" initiative, which is a joint effort of the United Nations in coordination with the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, with support from United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, development banks and other development partners. We believe that this initiative will help to further progress towards achievement of the first Millennium Development Goal.